

MONDAY, APRIL 12, 2010

APA Staff Objections to Fire Towers' Proposal



The staff of the Adirondack Park Agency has raised several objections to the Local Government Review Board's proposal to reclassify the tops of Hurricane Mountain and St. Regis Mountain as Historic Areas so that fire towers on the summits could remain.

APA spokesman Keith McKeever said the staff is not making a recommendation. However, the staff comments submitted to the APA commissioners are more negative than positive.

In a memo to the commissioners, the staff says reclassifying the summits as Historic would conflict with the Adirondack Park State Land Master Plan in four ways:

1. "Because of the large scale and dominating character of the fire towers, they are not appropriately located within areas that are essentially wilderness."
2. "Although fire towers could sit upon 'postage stamp' sized parcels of lands classified as Historic, they would conflict with users expectations of the surrounding wilderness have [sic] for a wilderness setting and natural landscape."
3. "The maintenance of the fire towers could cause various natural resource impacts," such as disturbing subalpine birds.
4. Maintenance of the towers—which might require flying in materials—would also "negatively impact the wilderness qualities of the surrounding lands."

Furthermore, the staff contends that relocating the towers to summits in Wild Forest Areas would conflict with the State Land Master Plan. Although the plan allows towers to remain in Wild Forest Areas, it says the new construction of towers "will not be encouraged." Of course, this would not preclude relocating the towers to private or municipal lands.

Both mountains lie in Forest Preserve tracts managed essentially as Wilderness, where towers are prohibited. Earlier this year, the state Department of Environmental Conservation recommended removing the towers. Despite widespread support for the towers expressed at public hearings, DEC is expected to stick with that recommendation.

McKeever said the APA probably will not decide the towers fate for a few months at the earliest.

The *Adirondack Explorer* will run a debate and a story on the fire towers in its May/June issue.

Photo of Hurricane tower by Phil Brown.

Posted by Phil Brown